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THE ORGANIZATION OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC WORK IN AFRICA

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1. Bibliographic work entails the recording and description of publications:- books, periodicals, and magazine articles, newspapers etc. that relate to a given subject or group of subjects. It could also pertain to a country, sub-region or continent. Bibliographies can be compiled by individuals acting on their own or under the auspices of a library or documentation centre. Professional organizations can also organize bibliographic control of certain subject in order to facilitate the work of research workers and others who may wish to gain ready access to the literature of their fields of interest. Governments also encourage and sometimes actively sponsor bibliographic work. Commerical organizations, especially publishing firms participate in bibliographic activities especially with regard to publication of current abstracts and indexes. As a matter of fact, the cataloguing and classification of books acquired in a library or documentation centre is bibliographic work. Furthermore, the collection, analysis and indexing of publications by mechanical processes constitute a bibliographic activity.

2. The various individuals and organizations named above which engage in bibliographic activities produce different types of bibliographies. Research workers whether in the humanities, the social sciences or the pure sciences need a ready tool for checking what new or current work has been done or is being done in their fields of interest. Such a need is admirably met by the regular publication of indexes and abstracts on various subject e.g. Biological Abstract, Index Medicus, Economic Abstracts etc. Retrospective bibliographies list works that have been published in the past with respect to a given geographical area and covering all subjects or most subjects or single or limited groups of subjects e.g. Bibliography of Sierra Leone by Luke, Bibliography of the Gold Coast by Cardinal, Bibliography of Development Planning by Akinyotu etc. By means of a national bibliography it is possible to have information about the number of books published in a country, regardless of whether they refer specifically to the country or not as well as on the distribution of such publications by subject e.g. British National Bibliography, Nigerian Publications. A cursory look at the literature of bibliographic work pertaining to Africa reveals as follows:

a) that some bibliographic activities are carried out in African countries particularly with respect to retrospective bibliographies;

b) that a few countries do publish national bibliographies;

c) that the bulk of current bibliographic work on Africa is done outside the continent in research centres of Europe and America:- the activities of the Library of Congress, Centre d'Analyse et de Recherche Documentaires pour l'Afrique Noire (CARDAN), Centre de Documentation Economique et Sociale Africaine (CEDESA), Standing Conference on Library Material on Africa (SCOLMA), to name a few, attest to the situation. The few efforts made in Africa include African Notes published by the University of Ibadan and Bulletin bibliographiques of Archives du Senegal;

d) that the activities of some international information networks do cover Africa although in certain instances the input from the continent is rather low e.g. FAO/AGRIS, the African component of which is to constitute PADIS/AGRIS.

3. From the foregoing, it could be seen that the state of bibliographic work in Africa is hardly satisfactory and the following urgent steps must be taken to correct the situations:-

ACTION TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

Encouragement of more indigenous publishing

4. At present over ninety per cent of serious publications used for research and education purposes is published outside the continent. That is partly the explanation for the fact that the bibliographic control of the relevant publications is principally done abroad most especially by the indexing and abstracting services. In order therefore to redress the imbalance it will be necessary for African countries to encourage more indigenous publishing. Some attempts are already being made in this connection like for example the establishment of the East African Publishing House. Furthermore, as has been observed elsewhere during the current Conference the results and findings of scientific research undertaken in African countries are published in overses learned journals. Consequently a large number of African scientists sometimes do not get to know of such work, a situation that can lead to duplication of effort. It will therefore also be beneficial if African governments can give financial assistance and encouragement to learned journals published in their countries, a good number of which are facing serious difficulties.

Publication of National Bibliographies

5. According to a 1967 survey, only the following seven African countries are reported to be publishing national bibliographies:- Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Rhodesia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, if we exclude South Africa. University libraries in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, include in their lists of accessions publications of their respective countries. The result of this general lack of national bibliographies is that research workers and others have no information concerning both trade and government publications that emanate from most African countries. In fact, it may not be far fetched to observe that this partly accounts for the absence of data and information which led the Conference of Ministers of ECA countries to call, for instance, for the establishment of PADIS. If African countries that are not ready doing so take appropriate steps to get their national bibliographies published, one basic step towards filling the gap would have been taken. In order however to facilitate the

publication of a national bibliography it is necessary as has been mentioned in another paper to enact a deposit law whereby either authors, printers or publishers of books are required to deposit a stipulated number of their publications in a designated library. A listing of the materials will constitute the national bibliography.

Establishment of National Information and Documentation Centres

6. Publishing a national bibliography listing books, pamphlets etc. that have been put out in a given country does not necessarily ensure the full coverage of all data and information relating to the overall development of the country. There are for example, research reports, surveys, studies etc. which do not qualify for inclusion in a national bibliography because they are not by definition publications. There are also periodical articles which are the results of research activities going on in different laboratories in the country. In order therefore to ensure the bibliographic control of the above forms of material it is necessary to establish national information and documentation centres which will undertake the collection, analysis and indexing of published and unpublished material emanating from the country. PADIS is already, as has been mentioned elsewhere, working towards getting African countries to establish national and information centres.

The role of PADIS in the Co-ordination of bibliographic work in Africa

7. The objectives of PADIS have already been described in another paper at this Conference. It is however pertinent to observe that PADIS is playing the role of a co-ordinating agency for bibliographic work on the African continent through its network of national and sub-regional centres. As a matter of fact, PADIS is implementing the following resolution which was passed as long ago as 1967 at the Nairobi Conference of African Bibliography:

> "That an international network for the co-ordination of bibliographic data on Africa should be established. That a documentation centre provided with key - punching and computer equipment should be set up as soon as possible at a suitable location in Africa to form a link between (a) national and regional centres in Africa and (b) centres in other countries".

8. Furthermore, when PADIS/NET will be established it will be possible to have quick exchange of bibliographic information between one African country and another. As a matter of fact, PADIS has facilities to provide SDI (Selective Dissemination of Information) and other bibliographic services for those who require it.